



## **UPDATE ON ORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Presented to  
Governor Bill Lee  
And  
Tennessee Dental Association**

**December 8, 2025**

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Commissioner**

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# I

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote, and improve the health and well-being of all people in Tennessee with a vision of healthy people, healthy communities, and a healthy Tennessee. Operating on the values of trust, compassion, service, and excellence, Tennessee Department of Health's Oral Health Services strives to prevent and control oral diseases through organized community efforts and provision of services. The following is a summary of those efforts during Fiscal Year 2025. The Tennessee Department of Health dental program expenditures for Fiscal Year 2025 were \$23,972,740 and are broken down by each program below.

### Key Service Deliveries Fiscal Year 25

#### **Oral Disease Prevention - Nurse's Fluoride Varnish Program**

- An expenditure of \$274,185 provided 12,159 at risk children with oral health screenings, referrals, and fluoride varnish applications by Public Health Nurses in Tennessee Department of Health medical clinics.

#### **School-Based Dental Prevention Project (SBDPP)**

- An expenditure of \$7,918,554 provided 49,814 at risk children with dental screenings or dental exams, 193,078 children received oral health education, 13,120 children received 39,108 Silver Diamine Fluoride treatments, and 38,082 children received 229,595 sealants. These impactful services were provided across 372 schools and 84 community projects.

#### **Community Water Fluoridation**

- 9 public water systems notified the department of health of their intent to cease fluoridation. The Tennessee Department of Health provided the best available information to water systems about the positive impacts of water fluoridation and the long-term consequences on oral health when fluoride is removed. After public feedback and voting by local decision makers, fluoridation continued in 3 of these water systems.

#### **State Oral Health Plan**

- Plan updates for this fiscal year include the Tennessee Oral Health Data source grid, a nine-page document that provides information and instructions for accessing oral health resources at the state and national level. The Dental Care for Tennesseans resource map was updated. The State Oral Health Plan Annual Report on Year 3 initiatives was completed.

### **Public Health Dental Clinical Facilities**

- An expenditure of \$15,597,447 provided 14,441 individuals with 26,763 patient visits receiving 126,171 dental services at an average cost of \$123 per service.<sup>1</sup>

### **Adult Dental Funding Program**

- In Fiscal Year 2025, the Tennessee Department of Health provided funding for 22,562 patients and 52,241 dental encounters. The Uninsured Adult Healthcare Safety-Net Program had 33 participating providers in Fiscal year 2025.<sup>2</sup>

### **Distribution of Information**

- The Department of Health distributed traditional paper literature covering a broad range of oral health information and dental care resources to other agencies and the residents across the state. The Department has an Oral Health Services website to provide the best available information to public health professionals, parents, community leaders, and the general public.
- Oral Health Services provided information on dental resources for the MyTN app. MyTN is a mobile application providing personalized service delivery to Tennesseans through technology solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of compliance with 2012 Tenn. Pub. Acts, ch. 1061 (the “Eligibility Verification for Entitlements Act” as required by Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-57-106(b)). The Tennessee Department of Health, including local health departments, boards and commissions, has implemented protocols and policies to verify that every adult applicant for “public benefits” is a United States citizen or a “qualified alien,” within the meaning of Chapter 1061.

<sup>2</sup> Expenditure total reported by the Safety Net Program, managed by the State Office of Rural Health . Dental funding was grouped with Community Faith Based (CFB) and FQHC, so the expenditure for Dental is not a designated budget amount.

## II

### INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF SERVICES

This report is provided in response to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-1-303(b), which requires the Commissioner of Health to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Tennessee State Dental Association (TDA) on the work done by and under the Commissioner in regard to distribution of literature throughout the state to inform the population of the “proper way to care for teeth”.

Tooth decay continues to remain a threat to oral health and wellness across the lifespan. It directly impacts every aspect of our daily lives, employment status, school attendance, eating and speaking. Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic conditions in the United States. The mission of the Department of Health is to protect, promote, and improve the health and well-being of all people in Tennessee. In advancement of this goal, the Department’s Oral Health Services Section (OHS) operates on the fundamental principles of preventing and controlling oral diseases through organized community efforts. The statewide School-Based Dental Prevention Program continues to offer high-risk populations preventive services to include oral health education, sealants, silver diamine fluoride, fluoride varnish, and screenings to identify children with unmet dental needs, referrals for these children, and follow-up on those children with urgent needs. Comprehensive and emergency dental services for children and adults, unable to access care in the private system, are provided in fixed facilities located in rural health departments statewide. OHS is currently involved in partnering with area dental colleges in support of the Governor’s initiative to expand the dental workforce. University of Tennessee fourth year dental students rotate through a health department clinic and help provide comprehensive dental services to a targeted adult population. OHS, in partnership with Meharry Medical College, have staffed 3 public health dental clinics with Meharry faculty and residents to help provide comprehensive dental services.

#### Summary of Dental Services

Program	Number Served	Number of Services
Nurse’s Fluoride Varnish Program	12,159	12,159
School Based Dental Prevention Program (Sealants)	38,082 (children)	229,595 (teeth sealed)
School Based Dental Prevention Program (SDF)	13,120 (children)	39,108 (SDF applications)
Public Health Rural Dental Clinical Program	14,441	126,171
Adult Dental Funding Program	22,562	52,241 (encounters)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,364</b>	<b>459,274</b>

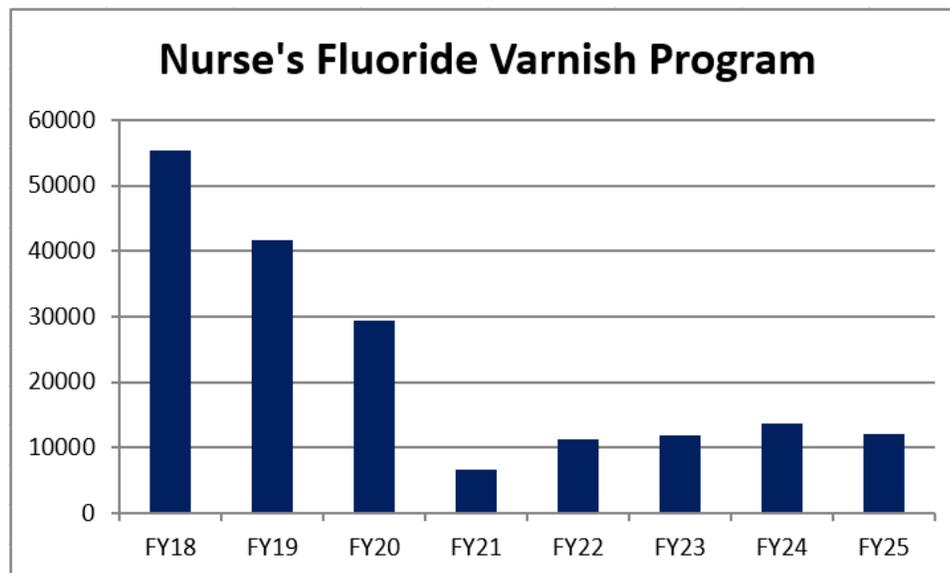
### III

## ORAL HEALTH SERVICES

### A. Oral Disease Prevention

#### 1. Nurse's Fluoride Varnish Program

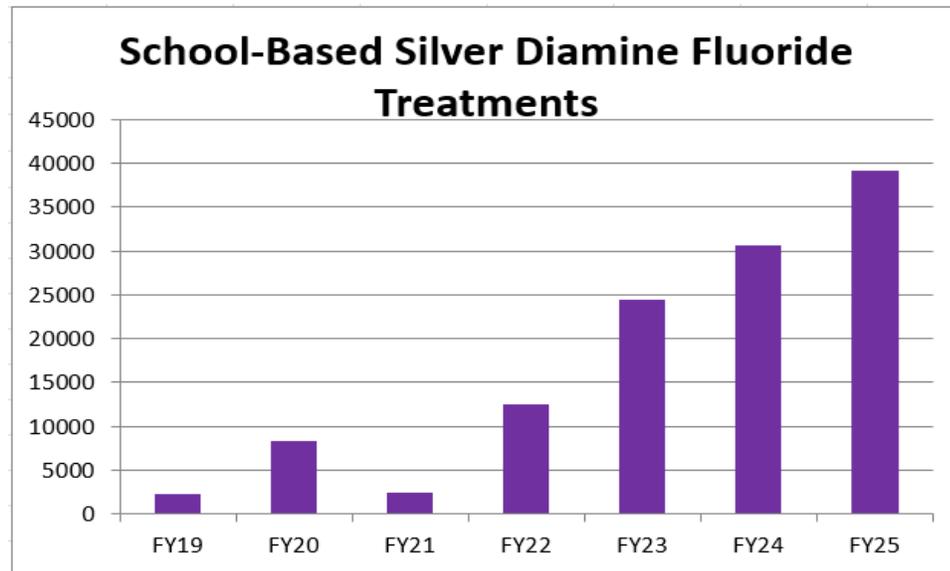
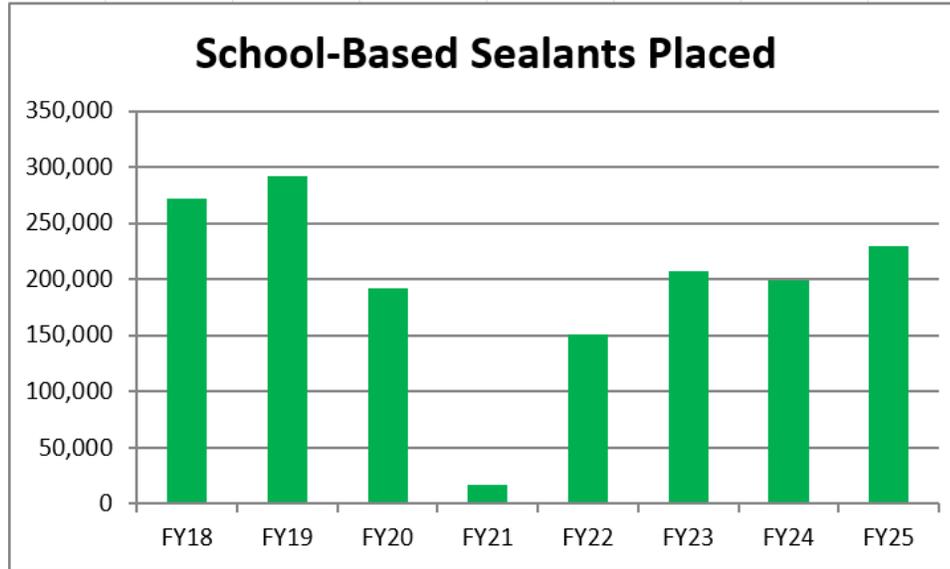
Tennessee Code Annotated § 63-5-109(14) allows Public Health Nurses to apply fluoride varnish to at-risk underserved persons in public health clinics. The Nurse's Fluoride Varnish Program targets children 0-5 years of age being seen in health department medical clinics. Nursing staff screen these children and refer them to dental providers in addition to applying fluoride varnish. During Fiscal Year 2025, 12,159 (8,361 were 0-5 years of age) at risk children were screened, referred, and had fluoride varnish applied by nursing staff in Tennessee Department of Health medical clinics. The number of fluoride treatments has increased following dramatic declines in FY20.



#### 2. School-Based Dental Prevention Program (SBDPP)

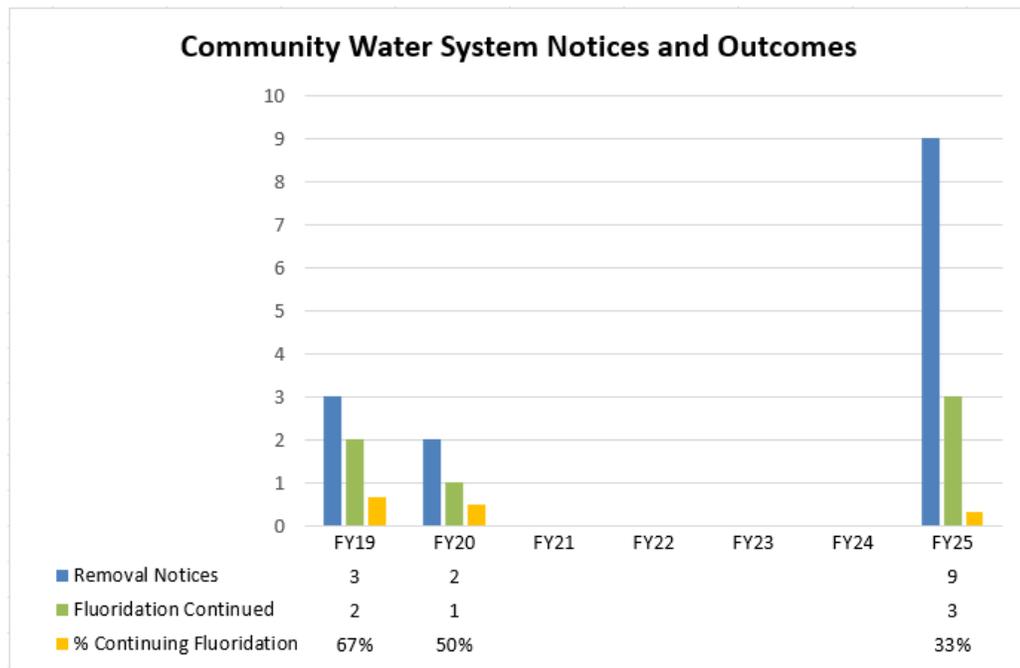
This program is a statewide comprehensive preventive program involving dental screenings, referrals and follow-up for dental care, oral hygiene education, silver diamine fluoride, fluoride varnish, and sealants. The SBDPP targets children in grades Pre-K-8 in Title 1 or Title 1-eligible schools and grades Pre-K-12 in Title 1 or Title 1-eligible unit schools. During Fiscal Year 2025, 49,814 children received dental screenings or a dental examination, 193,078 received oral health education, 13,120 children received 39,108 Silver Diamine Fluoride

treatments to stop dental caries, and 229,595 sealants were placed on 38,082 children. These services were provided across 372 schools and 84 community projects. During Fiscal Year 2025 the School Based Dental staff referred 17,522 children with unmet dental needs for follow-up, 3,770 of these referrals were urgent.



### 3. Community Water Fluoridation

Tennessee Code Annotated § 68-221-708(c) states, any public water system which determines to initiate or permanently cease fluoridation, shall notify the department of environment and conservation and the department of health within 30 days prior to any vote. The Tennessee Department of Health provided the best available information to water systems about the positive impacts of water fluoridation and the long-term consequences on oral health when fluoride is removed. Community water fluoridation, which is primary prevention, is the most effective and economical way to prevent tooth decay for all ages. During Fiscal Year 2025, 9 public water systems notified the department of health of their intent to cease fluoridation. After public hearings, where the public and Tennessee Department of Health were invited to make comments, the local decision makers voted to continue water fluoridation in 3 (33%) of these communities.



### 4. State Oral Health Plan

This summary is provided in response to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-1-305 which established the state’s comprehensive oral health plan. The Tennessee State Oral Health Plan frames the issues of dental disease while focusing on four overarching areas to address and improve oral health: 1) Access to Care, 2) Oral Health Education and Advocacy, 3) Prevention of Oral Disease, and 4) Oral Health Resources and Workforce. Each one of these four areas have up to five recommendations that work toward improving oral health for Tennesseans. The Oral Health Plan is reviewed, and its progress shared annually. The entire plan continues to be broadly distributed throughout the state and can be accessed from the department’s website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oralhealth/state-oral-health-plan.html>.

During Fiscal Year 2025, educational information on various oral health topics was added and the Tennessee Oral Health Data source grid was updated with current information on the department's website. The data source grid provides information and instructions for accessing resources for dental care, preventive services, and various surveillance systems at the state and national level. The oral health grid is located on the department's website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oralhealth/state-oral-health-plan/oral-health-resources-and-workforce-updates/oral-health-data-resources.html>. The interactive dental care for Tennesseans map was updated. The map is located on the website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oralhealth/dental-care-for-tennesseans.html>

## **B. Dental Services**

### *1. Public Health Dental Clinical Facilities*

The Department of Health offers comprehensive and emergency dental services to children and adults on a sliding fee scale according to income. Dental services are available at the 33 staffed local health department dental clinics located in rural counties, including one regional office. At the conclusion of Fiscal Year 2025, 33 local health department dental clinics were open. Dental services are typically offered from one to five days per week. During Fiscal Year 2025, 14,441 individuals made 26,763 patient visits receiving 126,171 dental services within the Department of Health dental clinics.

### *2. Adult Dental Funding Program*

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Tennessee Department of Health provided funding for 22,562 patients and 52,241 dental encounters. The Uninsured Adult Healthcare Safety-Net Program had 33 participating providers in Fiscal year 2025<sup>3</sup>.

### *3. Distribution of Information*

The Department of Health's website includes an Oral Health Services site that provides a broad range of information to public health professionals, parents, community leaders, and the general public. The website address for Oral Health Services is <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oralhealth.html>.

Staff in all the Department's dental programs distribute literature and educational information to individuals served. This information addresses a wide variety of preventive dental topics such as the importance of oral health and proper oral hygiene techniques. Requests for oral health information from agencies and the public are addressed by staff at the local, regional and the central office levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Expenditure total reported by the Safety Net Program, managed by the State Office of Rural Health . Dental funding was grouped with Community Faith Based (CFB) and FQHC, so the expenditure for Dental is not a designated budget amount.

Oral Health Services, in coordination with Finance and Administration, continues to provide information on dental resources for the MyTN app. MyTN is a mobile application providing personalized service delivery to Tennesseans through technology solutions. The website with information regarding MyTN is <https://www.tn.gov/mytn.html>.